



Cornell University

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Document Title: Researching the Spanish Pavilion

Author: Emily Eaton

Course: Spanish 1110

Course Title: Guts, Ghosts and Glory: The Writing of the Spanish Civil War

Year of Award: Spring 2012

Copyright Statement:

This material is copyrighted by the author and made available through the Cornell University eCommons Digital Repository under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial License.

This document is part of the John S. Knight Writing in the Disciplines First-year Writing Seminar Program collection in Cornell's eCommons Digital Repository.

<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10813>.

Spring 2012 James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize

We are pleased to invite applications for the James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize. This prize of \$500 will be awarded to the teacher submitting the best sequence of writing assignments for a First-Year Writing Seminar (honorable mentions, if any, will receive \$150).

Assignment sequences in a writing course are built around a series of essay topics. These sequences probably represent work assigned during a portion of the course rather than all of the essay assignments distributed over an entire semester. Submissions should include a rationale and a description of your plans for eliciting and responding to student drafts and revisions, as well as a description of how you prepare students for each essay assignment, for example by engaging them in preparatory writing exercises, including informal writing designed to help students understand the material on which they subsequently write formal essays. Reflections on what worked well, and why, and what you would change another time, are welcome.

The winner will be announced to the Cornell community. Prize Winning Materials will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing.)

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Friday, May 18. No exceptions can be made.

Spring 2012 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only.~

Instructor's name Emily Eaton

Department ROMS Course # and title Span 1110 Guts Ghosts + Glory The
Writing of the Spanish Civil War

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the assignment sequence, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the assignment sequence in a web accessible archive and make it available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna O'Hara (dlo1@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Researching the Spanish Pavilion
Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature

Emily Eaton

Date

5/17/12

Overview of the Assignment Sequence: Researching the Spanish Pavilion

The assignment sequence that I'm submitting for the James Slevin Prize consists of two distinct and yet topically linked final essays plus the preparatory activities comprising each. These were essay numbers three and four of the semester.

For their third essay, students conducted guided independent research about the artworks displayed at the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 World Exposition in Paris. (The Pavilion was erected by the Spanish Republic during the midst of the Spanish Civil War in order to garner international support for the left.) This assignment culminated in a creative essay in which students imagined themselves as visitors to the fair and wrote a letter to a friend about one artwork they had seen in the Spanish Pavilion.

The following assignment had students continue to study the same artwork, but this time producing a more formal, traditionally academic essay: after finding and reading a scholarly article about the artwork or its artist, students were to combine analysis of the former with analysis of the latter, demonstrating an ability to engage with both secondary texts (a scholarly article) and primary visual/literary ones.

The preparatory activities that culminated in these two separate yet linked essay sequences are outlined in the attached materials that students received as the assignments progressed. For both essays, I guided my students through a series of tasks meant to facilitate particular learning outcomes (indicated on essay guidelines) that aimed for student development of certain writing and research skills as well as consideration of core course concepts.

I designed both essay sequences in "backwards" fashion according to the following process: after considering the specific learning outcomes I ultimately wanted my students to reach via each assignment, I then brainstormed what sort of final essay topic and format would facilitate progress toward those outcomes, and finally I determined what preliminary steps would most usefully lead my students to produce the desired essay format. I have summarized that process and the assignment design in the "rationale" sections below, followed by additional details regarding the execution and relative success of each assignment.

Essay 3*Sequence Rationale*

Since Essays 1 and 2 had required student analysis of a single primary text (a painting and a poem), for Essay 3 it was now time to challenge my students with an assignment that would require negotiation of multiple sources, both primary and secondary. This would prepare them for increasingly sophisticated essay assignments during the remainder of our course and their years at Cornell.

Of course, if I expected my students to engage with multiple texts, I had to give them the skills to locate these texts and interact with them according to the conventions of my field. I had to plan an essay that would require students to familiarize themselves with library resources and the MLA source documentation system. The natural choice was to design a research project assignment sequence.

options they had for locating sources. However, due to the topic's obscure nature and many students' research inexperience, I knew that they would need additional guidance in gathering sources and assessing their usefulness after reading them. I decided that the first step after the library session would be submission of an annotated bibliography of at least three sources and a list of the pavilion's artworks that students had discovered in their research. After sharing these initial results of their research with me and with their classmates, students would be ready to complete a rough draft of their letter and then, following peer and instructor feedback, the final version. The sequence of student steps was thus established: library session, independent research, annotated bibliography & list of artworks, rough draft, and final draft.

Essay 3 Execution & Reflections

Even as students progressed through these steps outside of class, I designed in-class activities to guide them through the process and to emphasize the collaborative nature of our research. We looked at many examples of effective and ineffective paraphrasing, and students completed style exercises in which they paraphrased and summarized points from other texts we were reading. I also handed out examples of annotated bibliography entries and asked the students to read them and identify key stylistic characteristics and also the criteria by which the usefulness of each listed source was assessed. Together we composed a list of these points so that students would have a model and guidelines when writing their own annotated bibliographies and when assessing the usefulness of their sources for our particular project. While I thus gave them tools to successfully conduct their research and describe what they had learned, at no point did I lecture or provide any readings about the topic.

When the first written step of the sequence (the annotated bibliographies and list of artworks) was due, I hoped that my students had been successful with their research, but I was unsure what to expect. For that day's class, I nervously prepared a very simple PowerPoint presentation that just featured photos of the pavilion and the different artworks it contained. My plan was to go through the slides and elicit information from the students regarding the pavilion's architecture, the artists involved, and the artworks themselves. I was hoping it would be a sort of group lecture/discussion in which all would contribute specific things they'd learned. Though I didn't expect any single student to have learned everything there is to know about the pavilion, I was aiming for a sort of collectively comprehensive coverage of the topic.

The class session exceeded my expectations, and was one of the most energetic ones of the whole semester. The students were eager to share all they'd learned about the pavilion itself and to recommend various sources to their classmates--many of the sources they had found were indeed new to me! I participated very little in that day's discussion and yet my students received a more comprehensive perspective on the pavilion than they did, perhaps, on any other topic discussed that semester.

The extremely successful collaborative nature of the assignment continued with my next move, which was to compile a master annotated bibliography composed of all students' entries and post it on Blackboard for everyone to consult. Upon reading over their entries, I was very

3

Essay 3: Researching the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 World Exposition in Paris

Learning Outcomes: In addition to the general course learning outcomes, this essay sequence more particularly allows you to develop and demonstrate your ability to:

- Familiarize yourselves with library resources relevant to our course
- Gather sources, cite them using the MLA format, and assess their value to your research
- Integrate written description and analysis in a seamless and sophisticated fashion
- Use summary/paraphrase when communicating information gleaned from another source
- Generate a sophisticated analysis of the interplay between aesthetic and political objectives in an art work

Assignment: After researching the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 World Exposition in Paris, you will write a creative essay that demonstrates what you've learned about the pavilion and includes your own analysis of a specific artwork you've discovered in your research. The essay prompt is as follows: *Imagine that you were a visitor to the World Expo in 1937 and observed the Spanish Pavilion firsthand. Before you went, you were indifferent to the war in Spain, and now you are an ardent supporter of the Republican cause. Write a 4-5 page letter to a friend back home about how the Spanish Pavilion brought about this change in you.*

Your friend has not seen the pavilion, so some initial descriptive material will be necessary. Though you'll need to give your friend an idea of the general layout and what was included, you should focus on ONE artwork in particular, analyzing the interplay between its aesthetic and the political objectives. While you are free to express your opinions and emotional reactions, you must ground these in an analysis of the formal components of the artwork, using specific examples.

Even though this is a letter and thus less formal in tone than a scholarly essay, you should still have a main point that you wish to convey to your friend, a "thesis statement" that will analyze how the formal components of the artwork in question have served a political purpose in addition to (or perhaps to the detriment of?) an aesthetic one. Whenever you paraphrase information gleaned from your research, you should include parenthetical references as needed and a "Works Cited." You should avoid using direct quotes, unless they are from the artwork itself or secondary sources contemporary to the exposition—let's maintain the illusion of a 1937 correspondence!

Assignment Tasks

1. Library Session on 1/31

On January 31st we will meet at Uris Library with Virginia Cole, who will show us what Cornell libraries have to offer! This is a required session, even if you have attended a similar

Essay 4

Sequence Rationale

As my students had Essay 3 underway, I was already thinking about my overall learning outcomes for Essay 4. The latter essay would be linked to the former because they would both address student interaction with multiple texts, both primary and secondary. However, the move from Essay 3 to Essay 4 would demand increasingly sophisticated modes of interaction: rather than merely conveying information from another source to a reader (as they did in Essay 3 with the description of the pavilion), it was now time for my students to also analyze another source's information and its means of rhetorical presentation. This shift would also demand that students not only learn to effectively paraphrase (a learning outcome of Essay 3) but to appropriately incorporate and comment on direct quotes.

I decided that the best way to reach these objectives was by having students write about the same artwork they had focused on in Essay 3 so that they wouldn't be starting all over from scratch—their ultimate analysis would be that much more developed and intellectually rigorous than in Essay 3, which would hopefully demonstrate to them that continued reflection through writing yields ever more interesting conclusions. Furthermore, because I would now be asking my students to *analyze* and not just summarize a secondary text, it seemed that asking them to simultaneously consider a new primary text would be excessive. I am also wary of assigning other scholars' analyses of a visual or literary text before my students have had time to reflect on it themselves, because I don't want their initial interpretations to be excessively colored by "expert" opinions. But since they had already begun a personal reflection on an artwork in Essay 3, it was now time for them to see and analyze these critical responses. Thus, for Essay 4, students were required to locate a scholarly article about the same artwork they had written about in Essay 3, and then formulate an argument that engaged both the primary and secondary text. This was the only essay of the semester where I assigned a format but not a specific prompt—there was no requirement about the argument's focus, it just had to integrate analysis of a primary literary or visual text with analysis of an article about that text.

Obviously, this is a fairly weighty task to assign to students taking their first-ever class on a particular subject, so I knew I had to give them lots of help along the way. I was also nervous that students would see it fit to lightly revise their Essay 3, making it less epistolary and more formally academic, and just add in a few references to a scholarly article. Because that would not really require the sort of analysis I had in mind, I knew I had to offer a carefully structured assignment sequence worthy of "essay status" in its own right.

The first step would be that students use the research skills, freshly practiced in Essay 3, to locate and read a scholarly article from an academic journal or an essay anthology. They would then write a one-page summary of the article so that they could fully absorb its argument and, in the process, clarify any points of confusion. The next step was to add another page of informal commentary, a sort of response to the scholar's argument. This would get the students thinking about which points they agreed with and which they didn't, which aspects of the argument were well presented and which were unclear, etc. At this point the students would

certainly confirmed the validity of the Knight Institute's emphasis on sequenced assignments. I wish that time had permitted each assignment to be realized in so many separate steps and with such extensive peer and instructor feedback.

The success of the assignment notwithstanding, I question whether I'd conduct it in exactly the same fashion with another class. What I'd mostly consider changing is the way students went about choosing scholarly articles. Some students ultimately chose articles that weren't particularly conducive to textual analysis, which was the main skill we developed in our essays this semester. For example, articles about the process of composition for *Guernica* or the filmmaking techniques used in Hemingway's documentary *Spanish Earth* don't lend themselves as readily, at this introductory level, to a textual analysis of the painting or the film itself.

I have brainstormed different ways to address this issue but I still have reservations. For example, I could hand out a list of possible articles for students to choose from, but that wouldn't allow them to keep developing their research skills and honing their ability to assess a source's relevance to a specific task. This objective is an important one and would be ill-served by an instructor's screening of possible sources. I also liked that some students used articles that I wasn't familiar with—though it made my job of helping them with the analysis a bit more difficult, their papers served the authentic purpose of writing in that they communicated new information to their reader.

Rather than change the way articles were chosen, I think I would add to the assignment a final reflective step in which students wrote an informal response about the entire process. Here they'd be able to discuss the challenges they had with integrating their particular article into their own analysis of the artwork. This would let them contemplate more fully the convergence and divergence between textual analysis and other scholarly approaches art and literature. Thus, even if they had picked a source ill-suited to the task, the reflection would promote further assessment of source relevance to an assignment.

1. *Bibliographic Information for secondary source due 3/8*

Before our class session on March 8, please email me the bibliographic info for the critical article you've chosen (what would appear in a Works Cited). If you're still narrowing it down, include any sources you're considering.

2. *Critical Article Summary due 3/13*

Write at least a page summarizing the critical article you've chosen & bring to class.

3. *Critical Article Commentary due 3/15*

Add at least one more page, this time sharing your thoughts about the argument you've summarized. Do you agree with all of its points? Why or why not? What do you think about the way the argument is presented rhetorically—is it effective? Don't worry about elegant expression: just get your thoughts down! Print TWO copies of what you have so far and bring to class on 3/15.

4. *Peer feedback session I on 3/27*

Over spring break you should complete the first Essay 4 peer review activity available on Blackboard. Come back to class ready for a productive conversation with your peer.

5. *Tentative thesis statement due 3/29*

Write a few sentences summarizing your own emerging argument for Essay 4. This will get you thinking in terms of a thesis statement. The main thrust of your argument should incorporate analysis of both the primary and secondary text. Bring your thesis statement to class.

6. *Rough draft due 4/3*

Please bring two printed copies of a full-length (5-6 pages) rough draft with intro, body, and conclusion, to class on April 3. You'll submit one copy to me and one to an assigned classmate in order to receive both instructor and peer feedback in the following class.

7. *Peer feedback session II on 4/5*

For our April 5 class you should complete the second Essay 4 peer review activity available on Blackboard. Come to class ready for a productive conversation with your peer.

8. *Final draft due 4/10*

Print your entire Essay 4 document, including the final draft, for submission in class on 4/3.